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IN SEARCH OF GOOD FOOD

## Kenny's blue cheeses are winning fans

By **Marty Rosen**

Special to The Courier-Journal

Kenny Mattingly of Kenny's Farmhouse Cheese didn't set out to become a cheese-maker.

In the early 1990s, Mattingly, whose family raises about 240 dairy cattle in Barren County, Ky., was worried about the future of milk as a commercial commodity -- and especially about whether he and his family could continue to make a living on their 200-acre farm.



Kenny's blue and gouda cheeses, which bear the label Kentucky Bleu, are worth checking out. (By Pam Spaulding, The Courier-Journal)

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"I thought that the only way we could survive was to grow in size," he recalled during a telephone interview. Then, after a farm trip to Europe, he returned with a different notion. "I was impressed with the way small family farms in Western Europe were finding ways to add value to their products

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Jack, Asiago, Swiss and Havarti.

"It started out as a business decision," said Mattingly.

But somewhere along the line, he became a cheese-maker.

And at a point when the simplest business decision might have been to build from his existing base, Mattingly decided to try his hand at making blue cheeses. "I think the blue cheeses are an expression of my warped personality," he said. "I think when you really get into making cheese you just start getting curious about what you can do."

After a trip to California, where he chatted with the folks who make Point Reyes Original Blue, Mattingly started experimenting with his own blues in February 2005. "I'm still not an expert," he said. "I'm learning something with each batch, and I'm never exactly sure the next batch will be the same as the batch before."

But for lovers of artisanal cheeses, novelty and innovation are as valued as consistency. And, based on a recent sampling, Kenny's blues, which bear the label Kentucky Bleu (firm and soft) and Bleu Gouda, are developing a distinctive authority that's sure to win fans.

Some of his blues don't look particularly blue -- because he doesn't always pierce the curd with needles in order to ensure that blue veins grow throughout the cheese -- but Mattingly is fond of saying, "You don't have to see the blue in order to taste it."

and market to their local communities. It gave me a new vision for our farm," he said.

So in 1998, he and his family started using some of their milk to produce Gouda cheese using Old World, hand-made techniques. That first year, the family made about 4,000 pounds of cheese. Last year, they produced 34,000 pounds of cheese in varieties that include cheddar, Colby,

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Nor do his blues necessarily have the crumbly texture associated with many Old World blues. Slices of his Bleu Gouda, for instance, have the same firm mouth-feel as his regular Gouda, and often show just a hint of blue veining around the periphery, but the flavor is a memorable mix of Gouda's sweet nuttiness and Roquefort's tang.

But perhaps the most innovative and original of Mattingly's recent experiments is the soft version of his Kentucky Bleu.

From the outside, it has the glossy rind of a washed rind cheese (which it is). Slice into it, and it has the mellow creaminess of a bloomy rind cheese -- a Brie or a Camembert. Taste it on a slice of crusty bread, and it has the rich sweetness of a classic blue.

Most of Kenny's Farmhouse Cheeses are named to evoke Old World styles: Gouda, Havarti, Asiago etc. And perhaps there's an Old World counterpart for this soft Kentucky Bleu, but I think it's a New World original -- and one well worth checking out.

You can find Kenny's Farmhouse Cheeses at the Highlands Farmers Market on Saturday mornings (where Kenny himself is usually serving samples). You can also find assorted Kenny's cheeses at Liquor Barn, Rainbow Blossom, Whole Foods and Lotsa Pasta, and on menus at such restaurants as Equus, Limestone and L&N Wine Bar and Bistro; or you can order directly by calling (888) 571-4029 or clicking [www.kennyscheese.com](http://www.kennyscheese.com).

Is there a food or cooking ingredient you love? E-mail freelance columnist Marty Rosen at [cjdining@gmail.com](mailto:cjdining@gmail.com).

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